

# The Elephant Man

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## Introduction

*This ungraded summary is for the teacher's use only and should not be given to students.*

### The story

One day, outside a shop near the hospital he works in, Dr Frederick Treves sees an advertisement about an ugly man who looks like an elephant. He pays to go into a dark, dirty room where a man with a very misshapen body sits. The shopkeeper, Mr Silcock, makes money by charging people to see Joseph Merrick. They have to travel around Britain because the police try to stop them.

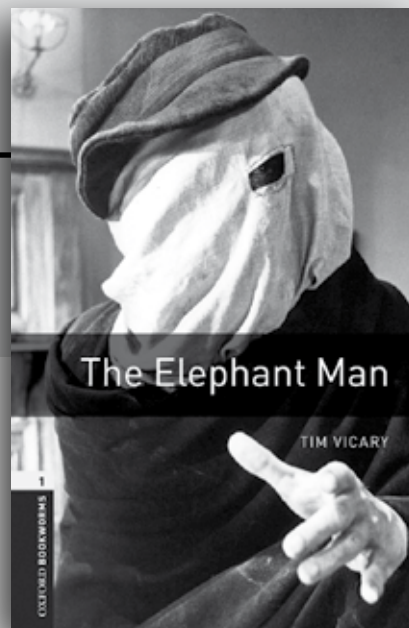
As a medical man interested in research, Dr Treves takes Joseph Merrick to his hospital to examine him. Joseph cannot walk to the hospital, so he is dressed in a very big hat and cloak and taken in a cab. When Dr Treves goes back to see Joseph Merrick the next day, Mr Silcock and Joseph Merrick have gone.

Two years later, the police find Joseph Merrick, tired, dirty and hungry, and bring him to Dr Treves because Joseph Merrick has the business card given to him by Dr Treves. Joseph Merrick is not ill but he doesn't have anywhere to live, so the hospital chairman, Mr Carr Gomm, writes to *The Times* newspaper and appeals for money. The readers of *The Times* give £50,000, enough to look after Joseph Merrick all his life.

The hospital gives him two rooms where he can live. He is able to live normally now and has a social life. The nurses are a little frightened of him at first and do not talk to him, but one day Dr Treves introduces Joseph Merrick to a beautiful woman who becomes his friend. She often visits with other friends for a cup of tea and to talk about books. Princess Alexandra, who later becomes queen, comes to visit Joseph often and sends him letters and Christmas cards.

Joseph Merrick is very childlike. He particularly enjoys plays for children and loves going to the theatre, where he is always taken in secret. One day, he asks to spend time in the country and has a six week stay in a quiet house where he makes friends with many animals.

Six months after the visit, Dr Treves finds Joseph Merrick dead. He usually sleeps with his arms round his legs and his head on his knees because it is dangerous to sleep on his back. But this night Joseph



Merrick tried to sleep normally and his head slipped off the bed, his neck breaking under the weight.

### Background to the story

There is still some debate about which disease affected Joseph Carey Merrick, but it is now thought most likely that he suffered from Proteus syndrome. In this disorder there are growths over the skin and bones of the body.

'Freak shows' were common at the time of the story and the West End of London, famous now for its theatres, was the site of many exhibition halls where the wealthy could go to look at 'exhibits' like Joseph Merrick.

Poorer people, however, went to the Mile End Road in the east of London to see dwarves, giants etc. in market street stalls along the way. Public opinion towards freak shows started to change around the time of the story and they were shut down.

Joseph Merrick joined a freak show when he was seventeen because that was the only way to earn money. Although it is unusual nowadays to see human freak shows, there is still a fascination with physical extremes. The *Guinness Book of Records* has lists and photographs of people with extraordinary characteristics, such as being the tallest or fattest or fastest person in the world.

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## Pre-reading activity

### Take a letter

- 1 Where is Joseph Merrick writing from?  
Why do you think he is there?
- 2 Why do you think the Queen sent Merrick a wonderful card and a beautiful picture?  
What did the Queen write in the card?  
What picture did she send him?
- 3 Why do you think this is his first Christmas?  
He is an adult, so what happened at all the other Christmases in his life?
- 4 Why doesn't he remember having Christmas with his mother?
- 5 Why do you think Joseph now knows many famous ladies and kind people like Dr-Treves?
- 6 Why is Joseph so happy now? What does that tell us about his earlier life?

*The London Hospital  
23rd December 1888*

*My dear Queen,*

*Thank you very, very, much for your wonderful card and the beautiful picture. It is the best thing in my room, the very best, the most beautiful thing I have. This is the first Christmas in my life, and my first Christmas present. Perhaps I had a Christmas with my mother once, but I do not remember it. I have my mother's picture too, and she is beautiful, like you. But now I know many famous ladies and kind people like Dr Treves, and I am a very happy man. I am happy too because I am going to see you in the New Year.*

*Happy Christmas to you, my dear friend.*

*With all my love,*

*Joseph Merrick*



### To the teacher

**Aim:** To anticipate plot and the role of characters within that plot

**Time:** 10–15 minutes

**Organization:** Divide the students into groups of four, and distribute the worksheet to each group.

Encourage them to speculate and make as many suggestions as they like.

Let the groups suggest their own ideas. Then they could share their ideas with other groups. You should not tell them if their guesses are right or wrong.

# The Elephant Man

*While reading activity*

## Board game

### Rules

- 1 Each player takes turns to throw the dice and move their token a corresponding number of squares around the board from Start to Finish.
- 2 If the player lands on a blank square, they simply stay where they are until their next turn.
- 3 If a player lands on a square with an instruction, they should follow the instruction.
- 4 If a player lands on an F or Q square, they should take the top card of the F or Q pack, read the question on it out loud, and then try to answer it. If they get the answer right, they stay where they are. If not, they go back two squares. The card should then be put at the bottom of the pack.
- 5 The other players decide if the F or Q answers are correct. If there is a dispute, they can refer to the number at the bottom of the card, which tells them on which page of the book they can find the answer.
- 6 The players must throw the exact number on the dice in order to reach the end.

### The cards

To make the F and Q cards, stick each of the following in the centre of a 4.5mm by

8mm piece of card, and stick or write the appropriate letter on the back.

*Card fronts (continued on page 36):*

One day in 1884, Dr Treves saw THIS in the window of a shop near the hospital.

*FACT (1)*

Dr Treves gave the man THIS and he opened a door at the back of the shop.

*FACT (2)*

The creature had THIS over its head, because of the cold.

*FACT (3)*

Merrick could not walk far without THIS.

*FACT (5)*

Dr Treves gave Merrick THIS with his name on.

*FACT (12)*

When Merrick came back to London from Belgium, at first the police put him HERE.

*FACT (14)*

### To the teacher

**Aim:** To select, order, summarize and assess events in a visual format

**Time:** 15 minutes preparation, 40 minutes playing time

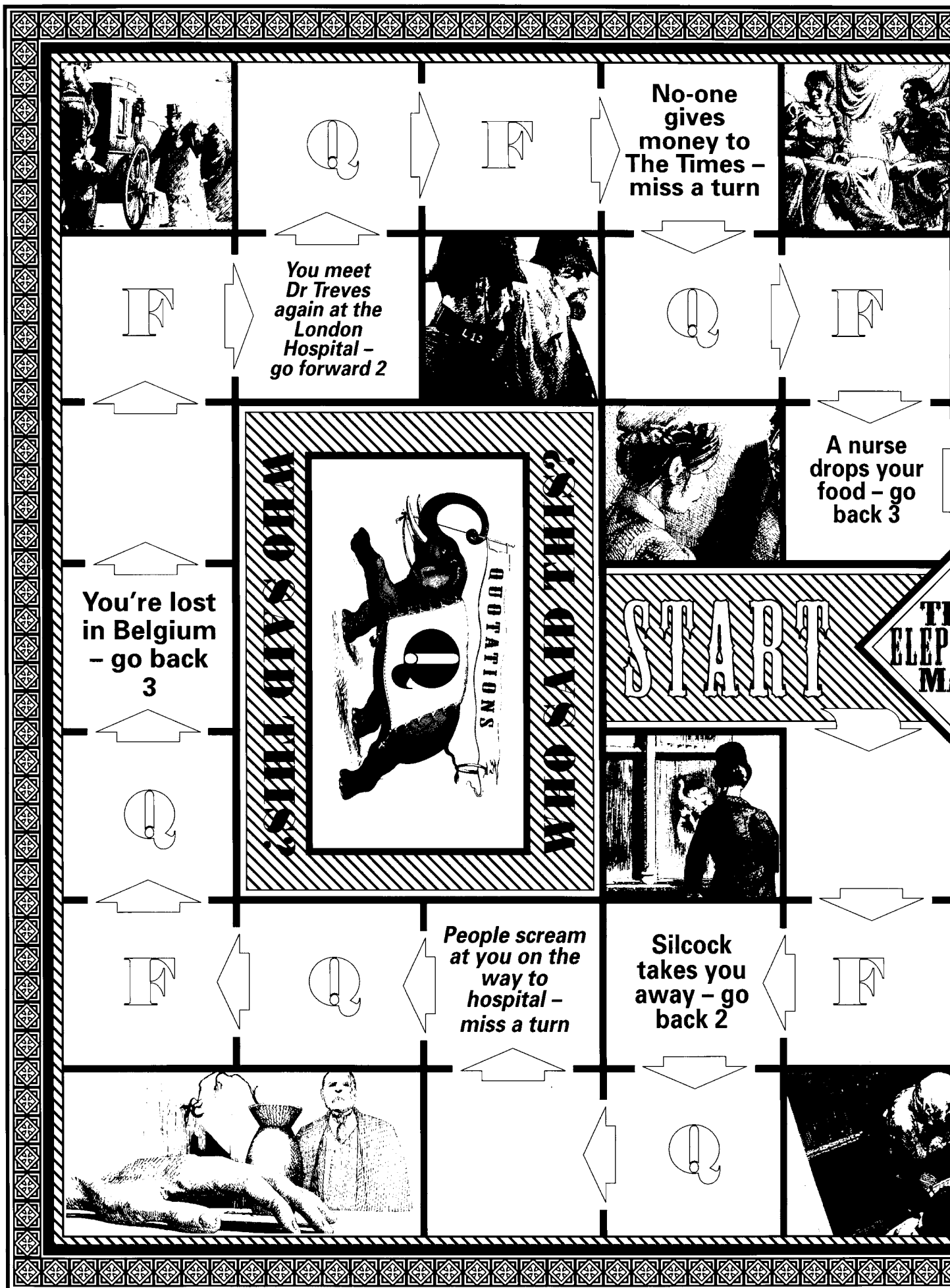
**Materials needed:** (per group of students):

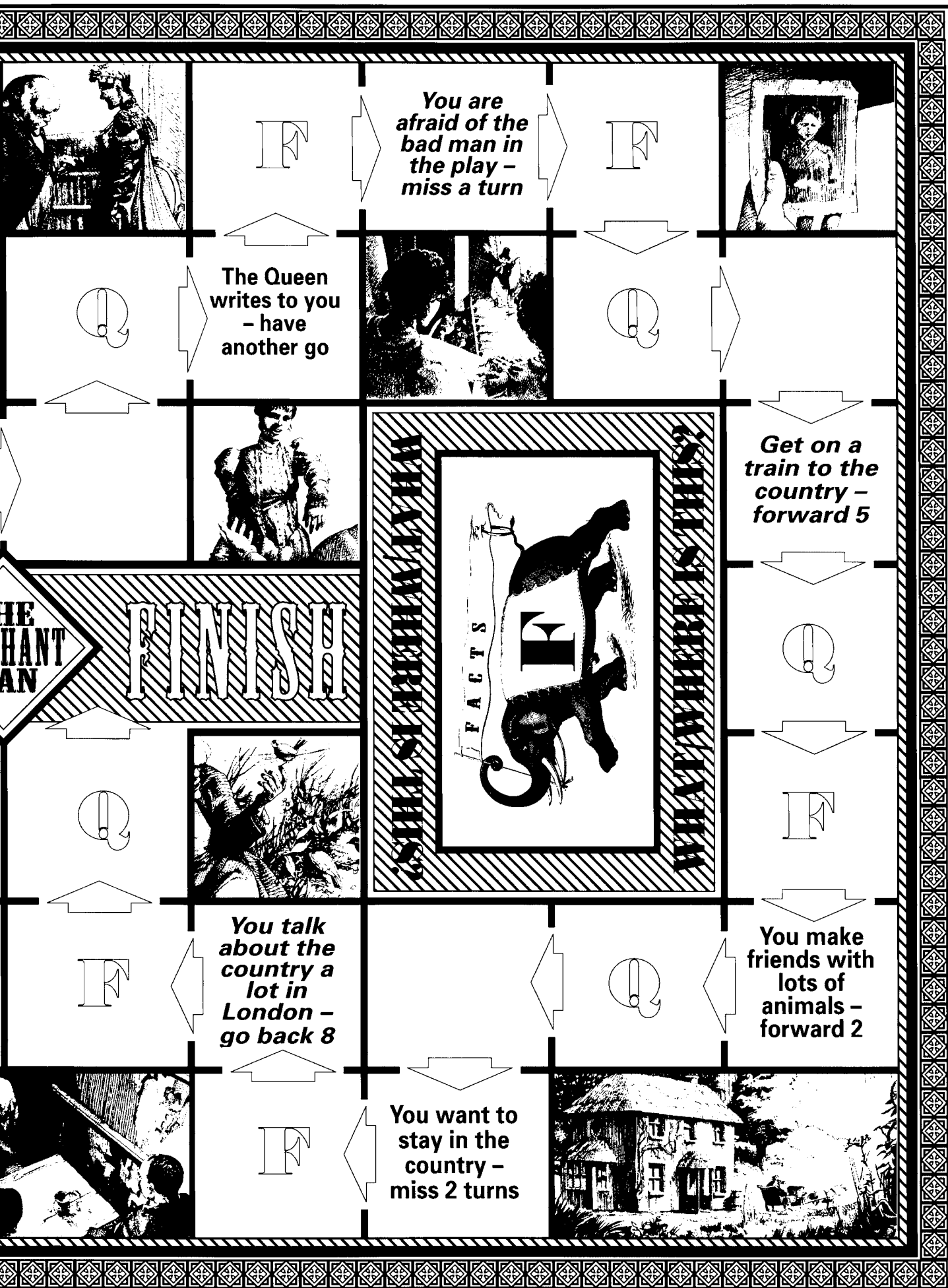
- 1 board (see pages 34–35)
- 1 set of F cards (facts, for the 'What/Where is this?' questions)
- 1 set of Q cards (quotations, for the 'Who said this?' questions)
- 1 dice
- 1 small token or object for each student to move around the board (ask students to bring their own

tokens, e.g. different coloured buttons).

**Organization:** Divide the class into groups of between three and six students. Distribute a board and the two sets of cards to each group. Go through the rules and make sure everyone has understood them.

Students may move around the board quite swiftly, so you may find it useful to say that the winner in each group is the student who has made the greatest number of complete circuits in an allotted time, rather than the first student to reach the final square.





Because of the £50,000, Merrick could live HERE for all his life.

*FACT (16)*

The new nurse screamed and dropped the food on THIS.

*FACT (18)*

THIS ran out of Merrick's eye and down the skin of his enormous, ugly face.

*FACT (19)*

Merrick would like to live HERE or HERE after the hospital.

*FACT (19)*

Merrick tried to get down on THESE when he met the Queen.

*FACT (25)*

Merrick had a lot of friends, but he was more like THIS than a man.

*FACT (29)*

In the morning, hundreds of THESE sang in the trees.

*FACT (31)*

The water in THIS made a beautiful noise, like singing.

*FACT (33)*

Here, this is my card.

*QUOTATION (12)*

I would like to live in a lighthouse.

*QUOTATION (19)*

A fat lady in a black coat!

*QUOTATION (10)*

It's very beautiful, isn't it?

*QUOTATION (31)*

What do you think they did after we left?

*QUOTATION (30)*

All right, sir. Give me twelve pence.

*QUOTATION (2)*

Do you want more money? Is that it?

*QUOTATION (7)*

Walk, Merrick!

*QUOTATION (5)*

Elpmyupasteps.

*QUOTATION (9)*

I'd like to see the Elephant Man, please.

*QUOTATION (2)*

No, please, Mr Merrick, do get up.

*QUOTATION (25)*

Hello, sir. Can I help you?

*QUOTATION (10)*

Nothing is easy for you, is it?

*QUOTATION (12)*

I think it looks like me, doesn't it?

*QUOTATION (27)*

Card backs: you will need 14 of each.

